

Dear Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee,

My name is James Bhandary-Alexander, and I live in New Haven. I am the Director of the Medical-Legal Partnership Program at the Solomon Center for Health Law and Policy at Yale Law School, and a longtime lawyer for low-wage workers, but I am testifying in my personal capacity, in strong support of HB 6859, SB 1177, SB 1178, and SB 1180.

Over the years, I have represented thousands of workers employed in low-wage sectors of our economy, including food service, construction, domestic service, retail, hospitality, and in the so-called “gig economy.” The labor markets in these sectors are framed by a patchwork of incomplete, inadequate, and sometimes harmful laws and regulations that leave large numbers of predominantly black and brown workers out of legal protections. And where basic labor standards do exist, we often have trouble enforcing them, either because we have not invested sufficiently in agencies that provide such enforcement, such as the Department of Labor Wage & Hour Division, or because we have not focused on making our agencies accessible to non-English-speaking and other marginalized communities, or because we have undercapitalized employers willing to simply fold up shop, go out of business, and declare themselves judgment-proof.

Poor labor standards hurt individual and community health. Extensive research demonstrates the link between [social determinants of health](#), including [income and employment](#), and public health. Wages are particularly important health determinants because they represent the [exclusive or primary income source](#) for most Americans. Labor and employment violations, such as [wage theft](#), are major contributors to low-income status, with resulting detriments to public health. Researchers have found links between [low wages and hypertension](#), and other studies have linked low income more broadly to [decreased health status](#) and increased incidence of numerous diseases.

Whether it’s a delivery driver who can’t pay the rent, or a server who can’t keep up with her student loan debt, a retail worker who can’t get their child to school because of unpredictable scheduling, or a breast cancer patient who does not have adequate access to paid leave, this committee is a unique position to make people’s lives better. I urge you to take it by standing up for Connecticut workers, and making sure that we have minimum standards for delivery and rideshare drivers, fair scheduling for retail workers, one fair wage for servers and the rest of us, and adequate paid leave for Connecticut residents struggling with illness.

Please support HB 6859, SB 1177, SB 1178, and SB 1180.

Sincerely,

**James Bhandary-Alexander**